

**MASTERCLASS****Vicki Thompson****Supple movement**

Dressage rider and trainer **Vicki Thompson** helps *Horse* reader Clare Leggat encourage her mare to relax in preparation for an important dressage test

**The expert**

Vicki Thompson is based at Oldencraig Equestrian Centre in Surrey. She trains clients in dressage from Novice to Grand Prix level.

Vicki has represented Great Britain at international level and has won 13 National Dressage championship titles. She represented Great Britain at the 1996 Atlanta Olympic Games. Visit: [www.oldencraig.com](http://www.oldencraig.com).

**The rider**

Clare Leggat's homebred mare, Sapphire, is out of a Thoroughbred mare and by a Hanoverian X Trakehner stallion. Clare competes the nine-year-old, 17hh mare in a variety of disciplines, including Novice eventing, affiliated show jumping and Elementary-level dressage.



**C**lare Leggat and her mare Sapphire are just weeks away from their first one-star horse trials at Gatcombe Park. They both arrive at Oldencraig Equestrian Centre for a dressage Masterclass, courtesy of *Horse*.

With help from former Olympic dressage rider Vicki Thompson, Clare is keen to iron out some issues in the pair's flatwork in time for the event. In particular, Clare hopes Vicki might pass on some tips to help with Sapphire's submission issues, as her mare is often tense through the neck.

Vicki asks Clare to describe her usual warm-up routine.

"I normally keep Sapphire long and low in her outline, and perhaps ride some shoulder-in," says Clare. "I'd ideally like her to be softer through the back, as she can be stiff."

As the pair warms up, riding plenty of circles and transitions, Vicki explains that Clare should ride Sapphire with a lower outline. This will then begin to stretch her topline.

"I'd like to see her more round when being schooled, and she's quite tight in the jaw. She needs to relax more fully in this area, and show you some more flexion," says Vicki.

**Sapphire needs to relax through her jaw and also her topline.**

# 1 The benefits of leg yielding on a circle

Leg yielding from a smaller circle on to a larger one aids suppleness and flexion.



Clare's hands tend to turn so that her thumbs are pointing towards the withers.



Vicki reminds Clare to keep her thumbs on top and pointing forwards.

To help the pair achieve suppleness and flexion, Vicki asks Clare to ride circles of around 12m to achieve a good inside bend. Then, she tells her to leg yield out onto a larger 20m circle, using her inside leg slightly behind the girth to ask the horse to move over.

Clare is reminded to ensure she doesn't ask for too much bend in her leg yield, or to use too much inside rein, as her horse may 'fall through' the outside shoulder.

"Keep an even outside contact," Vicki advises. "Remember, we are aiming to ride this exercise with the horse in a low frame, rather than a dressage test outline.

"Maintain inside flexion and make sure you have a giving, rather than restrictive inside hand, to encourage the horse to become lower and rounder."

Vicki also points out that Clare's position is in need of fine tuning. "Be sure to carry your hands so the wrists don't turn in, as turning them in can make the mare even more stiff and rigid. It is also important to keep the elbows by your side, as flapping them affects the rein aids – a good position allows you to give clear aids," she says.

Clare rides the leg yield exercise on both reins, and Sapphire is attentive and obedient – but she does seem to find the exercise a

little difficult. While she is clearly able to cross with the foreleg, there isn't enough activity behind.

Vicki says she'd like to see Clare aiming for more flexion when schooling, as well as asking for a more active walk in general – lateral work will come more easily for the horse when she is more relaxed."

